

International

Train derails as bomb on tracks goes off
Army deployed to crack down on Assam rebels

GUWAHATI, India, Aug 11: Around 1,000 Indian Army troops were deployed in the capital of the northeastern state of Assam today in a crackdown on separatist rebels, an army spokesman said, reports AFP.

The army has around 50,000 soldiers in Assam, where several militant separatist groups are fighting for their own homelands. Before Sunday's decision, soldiers had been deployed throughout the state but not in the capital, which was patrolled by police and paramilitary personnel.

The explosion that derailed the New Delhi-bound Rajdhani Express occurred near Sarupeta, 120 kilometres (90 miles) west of Guwahati.

Many Indians for Queen's apology for Jallianwala Bagh massacre

AMRITSAR, India, Aug 11: When Queen Elizabeth II visits India during its celebrations marking 50 years of independence, she will walk into a mounting controversy over a 1919 massacre of civilians by British troops, reports AFP.

Indian people will feel proud because it was a massacre of completely unarmed people, says Shiv Kumar Mukherjee, who manages a memorial here.

Many want the British monarch to go further. The killing occurred on April 13, 1919 when thousands of Indians had gathered at a walled-in area of open ground known as Jallianwala Bagh, a stone's throw from the Golden Temple, the holiest shrine of the Sikhs.



Professor Muhammad Yunus, Managing Director of Grameen Bank was received by the President K R Narayanan of India at the Rashtrapati Bhavan on Thursday. Professor Yunus briefed him on Grameen Bank activities and the progress of microcredit movement following the summit in Washington DC. President Narayanan showed keen interest in the subject.

BRIEFLY

2 testify against Kim's son: Two key witnesses testified in court Monday that millions of dollars they gave to a son of President Kim Young-sam in the early 1990s were bribes, AP reports from Seoul.

Clash leaves 12 hurt in India: At least 12 people, including a 5-year-old boy, were injured in police firing and clashes between rival groups of Hindu devotees over the control of a small temple, police said on Monday, AP reports from Hyderabad.

Snowstorm claims 6 in Peru: Six people froze to death Sunday inside vehicles trapped on roads covered in as much as two metres (6.6 feet) of snow, civil defence officials told AFP, reports from Abancay.

6 opposition leaders held in Mali: The six main leaders of Mali's radical opposition were arrested in Bamako Sunday following the lynching of a police officer, reliable sources said, AFP reports from Bamako.

Kidnapped Italian freed in Yemen: Yemeni tribesmen on Sunday released a kidnapped Italian tourist after a standoff with 400 police officers who surrounded the kidnappers' desert stronghold in remote eastern Yemen with tanks, officials said, AP reports from San'a.



Bosnian Serb President Biljana Plavsic acknowledges the applause of local residents in Gradiška during a gathering of some thousand people in Bosnia late on Sunday. The people arrived to show their support to the president. — AFP/UNB photo

Accidents claim 30 IAF pilots since '94: NEW DELHI, Aug 11: Thirty Indian Air Force pilots have died in accidents since 1994, a minister told parliament today, reports AFP.

Steps have also been taken for modernisation of areas around airfields. He added that the loss suffered by the Indian Air Force was about 178 million dollars. The force has lost 94 aircraft during routine flying missions in the last four years during 1996.

Mid-east peace talks US mediation bid appears to make headway

JERUSALEM, Aug 11: A US effort to rescue the battered peace process appeared to make headway early Monday with reports of an agreement by Israeli and Palestinian officials to resume regular talks on security issues, reports AP.

Israel radio, quoting an unnamed Palestinian official, said the talks between Israeli, Palestinian and US officials would be aimed at leading to a renewal of peace talks as well.

The agreement was reported after a long day of shuttle diplomacy by US President Bill Clinton's Middle East envoy Dennis Ross.

Ross said his orders from Clinton were to restore the "security underpinning" of the peace process and resume security cooperation between Israeli and Palestinian security forces.

Ross met twice Sunday with both Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and succeeded in bringing their security officials together around midnight in the autonomous West Bank city of Ramallah.

There are signs of improvement, said Maj Gen Ziad el-Atrash, the Palestinian official in charge of security coordination with Israel, before the security meeting. There will be intensive meetings in the next few days.

Reuter adds Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will begin a four-day visit to Japan on August 24 to discuss the frozen Middle East peace process with his Japanese counterpart, Ryutaro Hashimoto, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said today.

Tension is a way of life in Indo-Pak border

GAYANI BASE CAMP, Disputed Territories, Aug 11: At this barren army camp nestled among forbidding, snowcapped peaks sits a large boulder painted with the motto: "Death Before Dishonour," reports AP.

Nearby, Pakistan's special mountaineering forces rappel down a 90-degree rock precipice, shouting "Allah-Hu-Akbar" — God is Great.

They are training for service on the rugged Siachin Glacier, a frozen 45 mile-long strip of land on the restive India-Pakistan line.

At the numbing altitude of 13,000 feet, winter temperatures can drop to 122 degrees below zero. More casualties are caused by severe weather than by battles.

funded Human Development Centre. "I think it's sheer madness for both countries when the total expense is estimated to be nearly 400 million dollars a year," he said.

The barren stretch of land is uninhabitable and offers no known material resources. Haq suggests Pakistan and India agree to move troops off

the icy peak. "Until they can agree on whose peak it is, and divert the money for girls' education."

Indian sent troops to occupy Siachin in the early 1990s to protest an agreement Pakistan signed with China delineating the border north of the glacier. Pakistan responded by sending in its own soldiers.

Fresh fighting erupts in Tajik capital

DUSHANBE, Tajikistan, Aug 11: After a weekend of fighting in the capital Dushanbe, more clashes were reported Monday in an outlying town in this restive Central Asian nation, reports AP.

In the capital, most stores reopened, public transport was running as usual and people filled the streets that were deserted during weekend shootouts between rival factions in the government.

Various accounts have put the death toll at anywhere from four to several dozen as a result of the weekend clashes. The fighting has raised renewed questions about government control in Tajikistan, where President Emomali Rakhmonov signed a peace deal with opposition forces in June, ending five years of civil war.

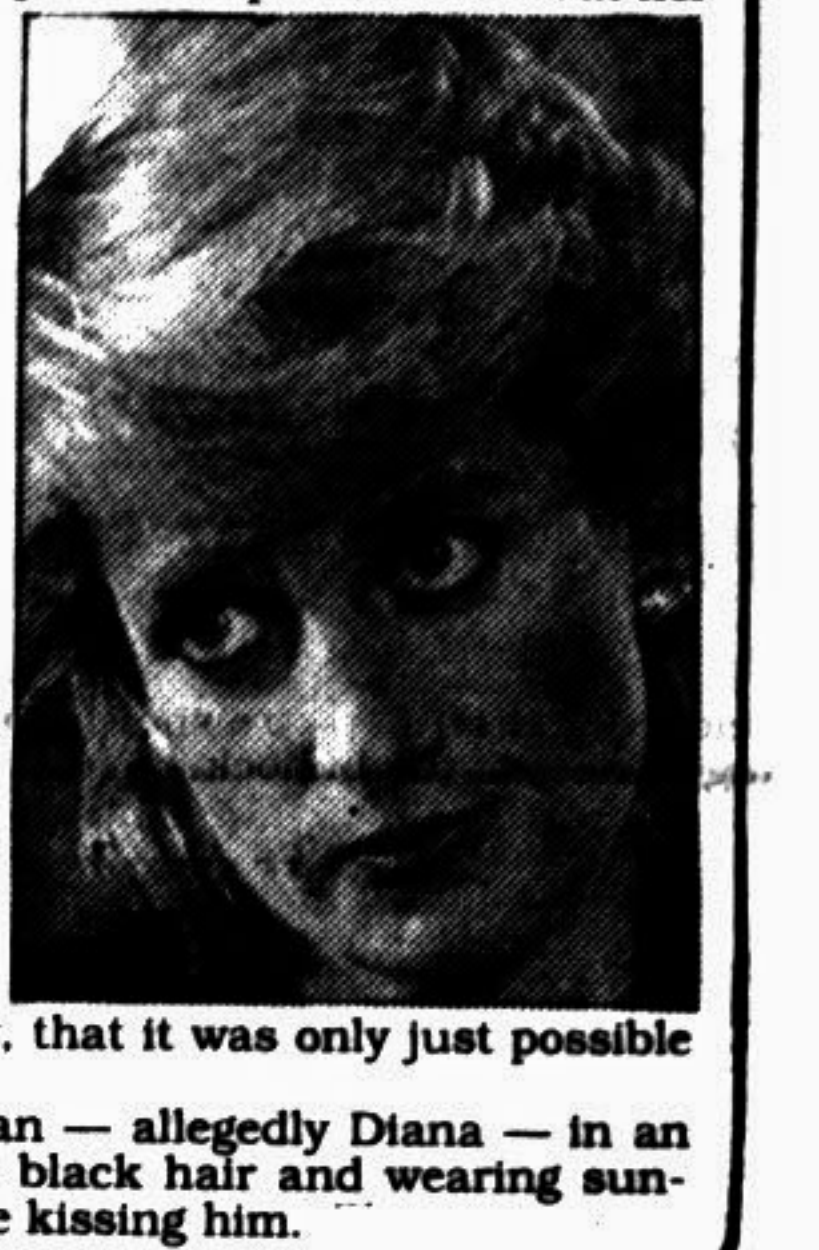
Unlike the civil war, which was a battle between government forces and various rebel bands, the latest shootouts have involved rival groups within Rakhmonov's government.

The fighting started Saturday in northern Dushanbe, 10 kilometres (6 miles) from the city centre.

Off the Record

Di finally finds her match! LONDON: And now he's off to buy an engagement ring? Fuzzy pictures published Sunday of Princess Diana embracing the man touted as her new boyfriend unleashed open season on her private life by British newspapers and speculation about her future, reports AP.

"Princess Diana has finally found a man who makes her feel like a REAL woman," said the Sunday Mirror, which reportedly paid 250,000 pounds (400,000 dollars) for the photos. Without attribution it told millions of readers that Diana's "repressed sexuality was being healed by the love affair with film producer and playboy Dodi Fayed who had flown to the United States to buy her an engagement ring."



Three showed a blonde woman — allegedly Diana — in an embrace with a man with short black hair and wearing sunglasses. In one, she appears to be kissing him.

TPLF explodes 2 bombs in Madras

MADRAS, India, Aug 11: An extremist group today exploded two bombs in this southern Indian city to protest against an atomic plant being built with Russian collaboration, police said, reports AFP.

Police said one person was injured in the pre-dawn blast at a cultural centre run by the Russian Consulate while a second bomb went off at a local election office.

A little-known extremist group, the Tamil People's Liberation Front, claimed responsibility in some pamphlets saying the blasts were in protest against an atomic energy plant being built near the town of Thiruvelli.

The group did not specify why they were opposed to the plant. Environmentalists have attacked the plant as environmentally unsafe.

A guard at the Russian Consulate here was injured in the blast, police said, adding a portion of the building had been damaged.



Anastasia, 11 months, tries to reach a cross during the memorial service of her father Tasos Isaac in the Cypriot village of Paralimni Sunday. Maria was born one month after Isaac was beaten to death at nearby Dherynia by Turkish and Turkish Cypriot demonstrators. The ceremony came one day ahead of the opening of a second round of UN-sponsored peace talks between Greek and Turkish Cypriot leaders aimed at ending the 23 years long division. Anastasia's dejected mother is carrying her.

Lankan military desperately seeking fighters for war against Tigers

RATMALANA, Sri Lanka, Aug 11: Inside a fortified camp ringed by moats, barbed wire and bamboo thickets, new recruit Rajita de Silva plunges her bayonet into a dummy, reports AP.

"The time has come for us to join the war and save our country," she says later at her training post.

Da Silva, the 21-year-old daughter of a goldsmith, is a bit of a rare commodity in Sri Lanka. Military officials say young people with such a patriotic attitude and solid middle class background are becoming more and more reluctant to fight in the country's civil war, now in its 14th year.

Young Sri Lankans once saw a military career as a sure way to a good salary and social status. That was before ethnic Tamil separatists took up arms against the government, controlled by the Sinhalese ethnic majority.

Now career-minded young people are avoiding the dangers of a bloody war, and the military finds itself competing for recruits against 200 or so foreign companies here to attract the best and brightest.

Even those it does sign up might not stick around for long: The military says more than 12,000 soldiers have deserted the army in recent months. Last month, it offered an amnesty for deserters — 4,400 people reported in.

Sri Lanka, an Indian Ocean nation with 18 million people, has 114,000 people in military service. The government estimates the Tamil Tiger rebels have 5,000 fighters, but exact numbers are unknown.

Brigadier Sarath Munasinghe, the military's top spokesman said it has been particularly hard to find air force pilots, and motivated, intelligent candidates to serve as officers on the battlefield. He did not give recruiting figures.

The situation is so serious that the military has had to dip into the nation's pool of 35,000 police officers to support troops at the war front.

Though the government refuses to give consolidated casualty figures, records compiled by The Associated Press from military press statements suggest 500 government soldiers died in battle in the past three months. Eighty-six more died in the first week of August alone.

Cambodian King offers to abdicate Hun Sen seeks Sihanouk's blessing for new govt

BEIJING, Aug 11: Cambodian strongman Hun Sen and his new Co-Premier Ung Huot arrived here today to seek King Norodom Sihanouk's symbolic blessing for the new political order in Phnom Penh, reports AP.

Cambodia's King Norodom Sihanouk indicated today he would soon return home as monarch, just hours after he offered to abdicate his throne if asked to by the country's strongman leader.

In a letter received Phnom Penh, the ailing monarch, who has been receiving medical treatment in Beijing for the past six months, said he and Queen Norodom Monieath would return home to attend a Buddhist prayer for peace.

The letter, dated today, appeared to conflict with a written statement received in Beijing earlier in the day saying he had prepared a letter of abdication and would give up the throne if tough Second Premier Hun Sen asked him to at a crucial audience at the King's Beijing home Tuesday.

The monarch, who observers say is a "master" at sending conflicting signals, did not give any date for his return, but the tone of the letter suggested it would be soon.

"My wife and I will go on a trip by plane to Siem Reap province of our beloved country Cambodia in order to attend a religious Sabbath Day and to join Buddhist religious ceremonies and offer blessings to our nation to restore peace and national reconciliation again," the King said.

AP adds: Cambodian King Norodom Sihanouk offered Monday to abdicate, and said he regarded his son's ouster as prime minister in a bloody coup last month as illegal.

Sihanouk's offer came as coup leader Hun Sen flew to Beijing to explain to the king how he plans to govern Cambodia. Sihanouk is in the Chinese capital receiving medical treatment.

In a statement released before Hun Sen's arrival, Sihanouk said he prepared a letter of abdication more than a week ago and that he was ready to relinquish his throne "When it is possible for me to do so."

But the 74-year-old monarch said he first wanted assurances from Hun Sen, whom he called a "strongman." "That I can abdicate without risk of criticism from him or accusations of having added greater difficulties to the country and people" of Cambodia.

Sihanouk has talked previously about abdicating and has said he does not expect Cambodia's monarchy to last much longer.

Hun Sen, who led the July 5 putsch against Co-Premier Prince Norodom Ranariddh, Sihanouk's son, said he wanted to explain his actions to the king and his "Government's plans for working, especially its plans in relation to the elections."

Information Minister Ieng Mouly said the visit was significant because Sihanouk is "A symbol of Cambodia sovereignty" and it is important to show him that things have "returned to normal."

The king said he would meet Hun Sen and Ung Huot. Hun Sen's hand-picked successor to Ranariddh, on Tuesday in his residence. He also will meet Chea Sim, who Sihanouk has designated acting head of state.

Sihanouk, who has described Ung Huot as a "puppet," said he still regards Ranariddh as prime minister and decried his removal as "illegal and unconstitutional."

"I have never changed this position, which is and will remain my own," he said in a statement handwritten on Sunday.

Fresh fighting may erupt in Congo: BRAZZAVILLE, Aug 11: Gunfire could be heard in the capital of Republic of Congo Sunday, and the government issued a statement accusing the rebels of 'provocation,' reports AP.

Across the river in neighbouring Congo, meanwhile, boats were arriving with people fleeing the renewed fighting. The gunfire was so intense that it could be heard in Kinshasa, capital of Congo.

The developments came two days after the UN Security Council said no UN peacekeeping force will be sent to the Republic of Congo until the warring parties agreed on a "political process," a lasting cease-fire and guarantees for security of the main airport.

Both Da Silva and Chandrakanthi are Sinhalese, the ethnic group that makes up 75 per cent of the population and, according to military analysts, 96 per cent of the army.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and other Tamil militias are fighting for a separate nation, or at least autonomy, to preserve their language, culture and economic opportunities.

Meeting with township education officers and school heads in the capital of Yangon today, the minister called for teacher-parent cooperation for peaceful pursuit of education, the schools were closed in early December last year following a series of demonstrations by some university students in the capital.

All schools in Myanmar to open today: YANGON, Aug 11: All basic education schools (primary to high schools) in Myanmar will be reopened tomorrow after a long suspension of classes since December last year, reports Xinhua.